

## ROLE MODEL

# Lesley Rees

The consultant and professor of paediatric nephrology tells **Adrian O'Dowd** that the patient perspective should be at the heart of every doctor's practice



RICHARD H SMITH

### NOMINATED BY STEPHEN MARKS

"Professor Rees is an excellent clinician and diagnostician with an outstanding academic record. She is a leader in local, national, and international research.

"Despite her young age and health scares, she continues to work at full pace and is the most efficient of doctors with excellent time management skills.

"She will leave a legacy of a generation of paediatric nephrologists who are grateful for having learnt their trade from her."

Stephen Marks is a consultant paediatric nephrologist, Great Ormond Street Hospital

### NOMINATE A ROLE MODEL

To nominate someone who has been a role model during your medical career, send their name, their job title, and the reason for your nomination to [arimmer@bmj.com](mailto:arimmer@bmj.com)

It was during her first year at grammar school that Lesley Rees began to consider a career in medicine. "My mother developed Parkinson's disease in her early 40s," she says. "I read all I could about it and became interested in becoming a doctor."

It was, however, seeing her mother paraded in front of medical students who were encouraged to shout out diagnoses that made her determined to change how the profession treated patients. "I was outraged and became determined to become a doctor and change the way doctors spoke to patients," she says.

Rees attended the University of Manchester medical school in the 1970s, at a time when only 11% of the students were female. "That was the highest proportion in the country," she says. "I'm pleased that this has now changed."

It was while at medical school that she decided she wanted to be a paediatrician. "It was the opportunity to influence the health of a human being at the earliest opportunity," she says.

Between 1984 and 1990, Rees was a lecturer in paediatrics at Guys Hospital in London, in what was the first job share of its kind. Since then, she has been a consultant at Great Ormond Street Hospital.

Over her career, Rees has managed to secure more than £2m in research grant funding and has published more than 150 peer reviewed articles and reviews. Her *Handbook of Paediatric Nephrology* is used by trainees and consultants worldwide. She has also influenced national policy through her work with the Department of Health, specialty groups, the royal colleges, and NICE.

**The feedback I get when patients have left my care and gone on to adult care is very rewarding. I get emails about weddings and babies**

In 2016 she was awarded the lifelong achievement award by the International Paediatric Nephrology Association for her services to children with kidney disease and her role as co-editor of the journal *Paediatric Nephrology*. "Frontline working with families will always be what I most enjoy. But I also enjoy research because the whole point of it is to improve the quality of life of our patients," she says.

"The feedback I get from patients when they've left my care and have gone on to adult care is very rewarding. They come back and let me know how their life is progressing. I often get emails telling me about weddings and babies."

Rees has learned a lot from frontline care. "You have to be absolutely obsessive in the care of your patients, looking at every single aspect in a holistic sense," she says.

"You look at their blood results but you are also looking at their quality of life, their nutrition, their psychosocial support, their schooling, the impact of their illness on their family. The whole patient is very important."

Rees's advice for young doctors underlines her passion for keeping the patient at the centre of all she does. "Always try to think how your patients and their families must be feeling and be sensitive to their needs. Also, keep time for your partner and family."

Adrian O'Dowd, London

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Tolu Oni, 38, is a clinical senior research associate at the MRC Epidemiology Unit at the University of Cambridge. Born in Lagos, she qualified in medicine at University College London and worked for 11 years in South Africa, where she focused on public health and patterns of disease in an urbanising society. She completed her research doctorate in clinical epidemiology at Imperial College London in 2012. She is a fellow of the Next Einstein Forum, an organisation aiming to turn Africa into a global hub for science and technology.

## BMJ CONFIDENTIAL

# Tolu Oni

## Working on Africa's health

### What would you say to your former student self?

People give the impression of knowing a lot more than they do, so don't worry about asking stupid questions. Embrace the road less travelled.

### What was your earliest ambition?

I saw a documentary about open heart surgery on a child when I was about 8, and I thought, "Yup, I want to do that."

### Summarise your personality in three words

A dear friend once summarised me as small, black, and 100 decibels.

### How do you keep fit and healthy?

I run long distances. I don't really race any more, but I still do about seven hours a week. It's increasingly a meditation exercise for the mind rather than the body.

### Where or when are you happiest?

Running on a mountain, anywhere.

### What personal ambition do you still have?

To work on a greater scale with African cities to improve population health equity. Beyond that, to work in a capacity that applies science to connecting peoples.

### How is your work-life balance?

Better in my head than in reality. But I'm learning to earmark "me" time: distinguishing what I can do from what I should not make time to do, even if I can.

### What single change would you like to see made to the NHS?

A greater focus on prevention beyond the biomedical. Closer ties with health determinant sectors such as urban planning, transport, and housing.

### Do doctors get paid enough?

Yes, I think so. What makes this a discussion at all is the increasing inequity in society that's making daily life unaffordable.

### What do you usually wear to work?

On good days I dress as I feel; on less good days, as I wish to feel. So, whatever makes me feel good. But make no mistake—it's a well thought through exercise.

### What unheralded change has made the most difference in your field?

Big data. Population scale data allow connections that were previously impossible.

### What book should every doctor read?

*Healthier: Fifty Thoughts on the Foundations of Population Health*, by Sandro Galea. Brilliant insights into individual and population level interventions.

### What is your guiltiest pleasure?

Watching TV singing competitions while eating salty popcorn and *Maltesers*.

### What television programmes do you like?

Mindbenders with a fine line between reality and a (more) dystopian alternative.

### What poem, song, or passage of prose would you like at your funeral?

Hear? No. Perform? Yes. I'd like everyone to head to the nearest karaoke bar and belt out a heartfelt rendition of *Total Eclipse of the Heart*.

### Is the thought of retirement a dream or a nightmare?

The people I admire in retirement seem to use it to filter out the things they don't want to do—to do just the work they love. So yes, I'm looking forward to that.

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